

Solution Focus in Organizations



Ask Better Questions. Accelerate Change.

Solution Focus (SF) is a smart model for change, unique only in its simplicity. Much of what is espoused and practiced in Solution Focus has been around in various ways for some time. What makes it different, and possibly more effective, is the framework in which it is practiced, namely:

- What already works
- What we want once the problem goes away
- What small steps might get us moving in that direction

There are many change practices that are helpful to individuals and organizations. Positive Psychology, Appreciative Inquiry, etc., have helped build a base of powerful research and practice knowledge supporting the idea that, more often than not, we can make change work for us.

The origins of Solution Focus lie in the world of therapy. Not the kind of therapy that requires lots of our time getting to understand what's wrong and why with the purpose of yielding insights about getting better. Instead, SF looks at what we want to happen so that we can go forward. We reframe problems by looking among them for purposeful elements,

solutions within, and we willfully ignore the *cause* of what troubles us.

"Instead of problem solving, we focus on solution-building. Which sounds like a play on words, but it's a profoundly different paradigm"

*Insoo Kim Berg, Founder,
Solution-Focused Therapy*

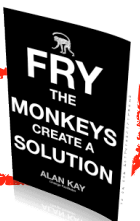
Steve De Shazer, Insoo Kim Berg's partner, subsequently came up with the notion that SF was like a set of skeleton keys that opened the door to solutions. Based on what had worked in the past, participants were encouraged to do something different and pay attention to the effect it had on them and others.

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Today, SF is transforming organizations. Few change models have so easily transferred from one discipline to another.

Most organizations tend to be problem-focused. Witness the SWOT analysis that mysteriously weighs heavily on the weaknesses and threats with scant attention to the strengths and opportunities.

That said, having a problem-focus is not entirely a problem – a great capability of humans is to understand problems and fix them. If scientists and engineers didn't root around problems, many medical discoveries wouldn't happen and bridges would collapse. Of course,

creativity also has a hand in the journey of human progress so have happy accidents – usually caused by diligent work.

So, if a problem-focus works for engineers, why is it less helpful for people inside organizations? The simple answer is that discussing problems and their causes slows things down, obstructs productivity and underutilizes people resources. In SF we don't obsess about the problem or its cause, so we can move more effectively and quickly to the things that work.

The answers to that often raised challenge are:

- a) It's what people want. We can't know what's 'right' so it's better to make progress right away and to learn something;
- b) If, indeed, we do manage to get a solution via the slower problem/cause mode, the solution is often highly constrained;
- c) Things change all the time and the situation often resolves itself by osmosis, only more slowly and not the way we want. So why not use SF to speed up the process.

How?

"Ah yes," you say, "but what if the solution is the wrong one?"

Be counterintuitive. Don't complain, understand, or fix. Instead...

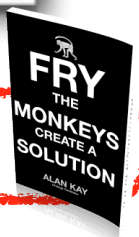
The solution focus steps	Why?	So that we...
Talk <i>briefly</i> about the problem, the 'issue' – <u>not</u> the cause	To quickly define a) where to focus and b) what we want to be different	Begin somewhere
What worked in the past? What's working now?	Despite the problem we're here today, so how did we do it? Something's working!	Affirm that we have strengths / resources that will allow us to see forward more purposefully
What we want to happen ideally in the future	If the problem were to disappear, what would we do instead?	Build on our resources to paint a detailed picture of progress and things done well with the problem gone
Small steps	With the resources and the better future in mind, what micro steps do we need to get going?	See ourselves making progress in order to take on more later

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*It can't be that simple, can it?
Not really.*

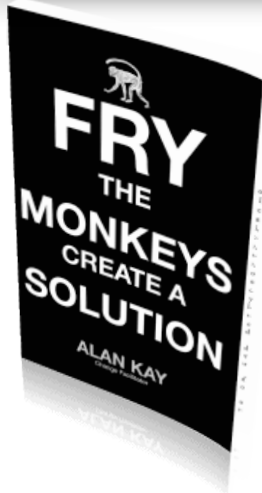
*In every practice there are many
deviations and exceptions thus, in
SF we treat every case as different.*

*Those who use SF see it as a
'toolbox' rather than a
'system.'*

What really matters is how we practice SF. These tenets help make the SF difference come to life:

- Ask, not tell
- Ask better questions
- The customer is the expert in the change they want, not you
- You and the customer do not need to have all the answers in order to make progress – work with what you have
- Find the resources and the small steps will appear
- Support your client by letting them own the ideas they create
- Change as little as possible

If this all sounds a little philosophical then SF may not be for you be careful not to dismiss it simply because it doesn't fit your framework for change. Change is happening all the time, with or without your influence, and SF is simply a method to speed up change that might just work.



Are you looking to become even better at facilitating change solutions?

This book shows you how to build a powerful tool for your work and make it the most useful approach in your facilitation toolbox.

Understand how organizations benefit by moving from an ineffective problem-focus approach to creating highly efficient solutions that are visible, agile, tangible and sustainable...just by asking better questions!

Learn the ingredients required to make Solution Focus work for you and the organization

Practice sensible Solution Focus recipes and see change happen right away



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